

Mayor FRIET of  
Bethlehem and  
former Mayor Shawa  
of Gaza are interviewed  
on site by Bill Monroe  
and Martin Fletcher,  
NBC and via  
satellite ~~by~~ in  
Washington by  
Barry Schweid, AP;  
Carl Rowan, Chicago  
Sun-Times; and  
Marvin Kalb, NBC

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SUBJECT Interview with Two Palestinian Leaders

BILL MONROE: Our guests today on Meet the Press, by satellite from Israel, are two Palestinian leaders: Maryor Elias Friej, the elected Mayor of Bethlehem on the Israeli-occupied West Bank of the Jordan River; and former Mayor Rashid Shawa of the city of Gaza in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Shawa, after being nominated by plebiscite, was appointed Mayor of Gaza by the Israeli military government. Then last month, the Israeli authorities removed him from office.

Our reporters today on Meet the Press are, with me in Herzelyya, Israel, Martin Fletcher of NBC News; in Washington, Barry Schweid of the Associated Press; Carl T. Rowan of the Chicago Sun-Times; and to open the questioning, Marvin Kalb of NBC News.

MARVIN KALB: I would like to start with a question for both gentlemen, and it comes from Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. He's quoted today in the New York Times as saying, "After a conversation with Palestinian leaders on the West Bank last week, I sensed a new atmosphere, a new confidence that they could speak their minds and offer their ideas freely without fear of PLO reprisal."

I'd like to start with Mayor Friej. Do you believe that is a correct statement, sir?

MAYOR ELIAS FRIEJ: That's an illusion.

KALB: And illusion?

MAYOR FRIEJ: That is an illusion. Yes. Because the people the Defense Minister of Israel met are nobody, have no

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constitutional authority or anything.

KALB: Mr. Shawa, your views, please?

RASHID SHAWA: I think what Mr. Friej said is absolutely right. These are a group of people that have been set up by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank. They tried to do the same thing in Gaza Strip, but they failed to do it. These people are actually representing nobody whatsoever. They are collaborators with the Israeli authorities. It's a well-known fact all over.

MONROE: I'm not sure who you're talking about, Mr. Shawa.

SHAWA: It's about the village leagues.

MONROE: You're talking about the village leagues.

SHAWA: That is right.

MONROE: The political organization sponsored by the Israeli government and representing rural population.

SHAWA: That is right.

KALB: Could I find out...

SHAWA: ...the villages.

KALB: May I find out from both gentlemen, please, who do you think represents the Palestinian people? Do you accept the view of the PLO that it is the sole representative?

MAYOR FRIEJ: The PLO is the official spokesman and representative of all the Palestinian Arabs, wherever they live in this world. Yes. The PLO is the representative.

KALB: Who elected them, sir?

MAYOR FRIEJ: Well, in a revolution you can't get an election. This is an organization that has been fighting for the rights of the Palestinian people for the last 15 years, and they are accepted by the Palestinian people who live in the occupied territories or outside the occupied territories as the official representative and spokesman of all the Palestinian Arabs.

MONROE: Thank you Mayor Friej and Mr. Shawa.

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MONROE: Our guests on Meet the Press, Mayor Friej of Bethlehem and former Mayor Shawa of Gaza.

We'll continue the questions from Washington with Mr. Rowan.

CARL ROWAN: Mr. Shawa, Israeli Defense Minister Sharon said here in Washington just two days ago that Israel will never leave the West Bank or the Gaza Strip and will never permit another Palestinian state to exist in the area. Are you prepared to accept this as a political reality that you and all Palestinians must live with?

SHAWA: Well, Israel is here by force. It has occupied the West Bank and Gaza Strip. And Israel can retain its occupation as long as it is strong enough. Mr. Sharon's statement that she does not accept a Palestine state -- a second Palestine -- on Palestine -- a second state on Palestinian soil is absolutely rejected by the Palestinians. We insist that we are entitled to a home. We are entitled, as human beings, to our self-determination. We insist that we are entitled to have an identity and a state of our own. And this may take some time, as long as Israel can suppress us. But ultimately we will get that role.

ROWAN: But Mr. Shawa, haven't recent events in Lebanon shown that Israel has more strength than the PLO ever is likely to be able to attain? So doesn't this mean that for as far ahead as you can see Israel will be able to dictate what takes place in that area?

SHAWA: It's very unfortunate that what you say is absolutely true for the time being. Israel is so strong that we do not expect to be able to force Israel out of this land. But we have a just case that the world has become very well aware of, and I don't think the world at large, I don't think the United States people, if they understand the actual situation, would not support the Palestinians in their demand.

BARRY SCHWEID: Mayor Friej, how are you going to get anywheres toward your goals unless you're willing to negotiate with Israel? Quite frankly, are you afraid to negotiate with Israel, for some fear that the PLO will take some measures against you?

MAYOR FRIEJ: I have been calling for the past 12 months for a reciprocal, mutual, and simultaneous recognition between the Palestinians and the Israelis. I stand for this. I've been calling, and I still call, that on the PLO and the Palestinians to make a Palestinian peace initiative, that this will lead to a political dialogue between the Palestinians and the United States, and between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

I believe the Arab-Israeli conflict could never be solved by war. It can only be solved through political talks and political negotiations. And I hope the Israelis will come to understand that they will have to deal with the Palestinians as equal neighbors and as equal partners, and to negotiate with us and with our representatives on this peace.

SCHWEID: Right. But the PLO is dispersed. It has suffered an enormous political defeat, as well as a military defeat. You're on the ground. You're there now. You're on the land. Isn't it up to you and people like you to take this initiative toward negotiations and recognition?

MAYOR FRIEJ: Well, I just tell you, since I've been initiating my proposals for peaceful coexistence with Israel, for simultaneous recognition, political talks, etcetera, all the responses that came to us from Israel were very negative. Very negative.

SCHWEID: Well, that means that you, personally, are not prepared to launch another initiative?

MAYOR FRIEJ: Well, through this journal, I initiate that there should be a peaceful dialogue between Israelis and the Palestinians on equal basis, that we will sit with the Israelis without preconditions, as equal. But they say they will never accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank, that they will continue to make Jewish settlements in the West Bank, that they want to continue to keep the military administration in the West Bank. So what's to talk about?

MARTIN FLETCHER: Mayor Friej, the trouble with what you're saying is that the Israeli leaders, Begin and Sharon, have repeatedly made it clear that they mean what they say. And they are now in the process of setting up the village leagues, the rural moderate Palestinian Arabs on the West Bank and Gaza to talk to.

By not taking part in those discussions, aren't you in danger of leaving yourself out entirely of this process?

MAYOR FRIEJ: As a matter of fact, there are no talks going with anybody. The Israelis have created these creatures. They're protecting them just as symbols. And these symbols or collaborators will simply sign a blank check for Israel. There are no talks between anybody going on any subject.

You should remember that the Americans, the Egyptians, and the Israelis for the last four years have been talking and negotiating about autonomy and could not reach any agreement. So who in his mind would expect the village league people to get any

agreeable agreement with the Israelis? It's going to be a dictation.

FLETCHER: But the Israelis have shown themselves capable of dictating these kind of agreements.

MAYOR FRIEJ: For the time being, yes, they will, because they have the military power.

FLETCHER: Mr. Shawa, when the Israelis -- the Israelis, by the war in Lebanon, hope to have broken the link, if you like, between the West Bank and Gaza Arabs with the PLO in Beirut through the Beirut dispersal. The Israelis hope that the West Bank Arabs will have lost faith in the PLO. You've shown quite clearly now you have not lost faith. But the Israelis also say the way should now be open for peace talks. Are you rejecting those talks?

SHAWA: We don't object to peace talks at all. We are a peace-loving nation. We want to attain our rights without any violence whatsoever. But Israel is not giving us anything whatsoever. Israel wants the land. It is talking of an autonomy where Mr. Begin says will never lead to self-determination, will never lead to statehood. Such an autonomy is absolutely rejected unless it's a full autonomy that will definitely lead to self-determination and to statehood and to an identity for the Palestinians. This will be rejected all through and forever. We may have to remain under Israeli occupation for another 10 years or 20 years, but this will never drive us to be a party to sign a submission to give up everything to Israel. We have our national rights. We stand for them.

MONROE: I'd like to clear up something that confuses me a bit. We originally contemplated doing this program by inviting you two gentlemen to come to the United States. And each of you told me by telephone about two weeks ago that you had applied for a travel permit and been denied travel permits to go to the United States. Subsequently, the Israeli government confirmed that no travel permit would be granted to Mr. Shawa, but said that it was false that Mayor Friej had been denied a travel permit.

Did the Israelis deny you a travel permit, Mayor Friej?

MAYOR FRIEJ: The facts are, on Friday, August 13th, I was summoned to the army headquarters and told I can't travel to the United States. Again on Sunday, August 15th, at 11:00 A.M., I was summoned to the army headquarters in Bethlehem and was told in the clearest terms I am -- my request to travel to the United States is denied.

MONROE: Apparently, there may have been a reversal of policy at a higher level. Did the Israelis later come back to you and tell you that you were at this point free to travel?

MAYOR FRIEJ: No. They are not talking to me.

MONROE: Mr. Shawa, what about travel and political rights, rights of freedom of expression in the area here? Do you feel politically free?

SHAWA: Unfortunately, we feel that we are very much oppressed. I haven't been allowed to leave Gaza Strip for the last 2 1/2 years. I am not allowed to go to the West Bank for 2 1/2 years. I'm allowed to go to Tel Aviv. I have nothing to do in Tel Aviv. So they permit me to go to Tel Aviv, but don't allow me to go to Jerusalem or Nablus or Tulkarm or Hebron or Bethlehem.

MONROE: Mayor Friej, you were about to say something?

MAYOR FRIEJ: I just wanted to [unintelligible] Mayor of Bethlehem.

KALB: Mayor Friej, you said before that you...were receiving only negative responses to your peace proposals from the Israelis. Have you received anything positive from the Palestinian leadership?

MAYOR FRIEJ: Unfortunately not.

KALB: Okay.

Mr. Shawa, you said before in this broadcast, "Israel is here by force." That's a direct quote. Do you accept the existence of Israel? What do you mean by that phrase?

SHAWA: I do not accept the existence of Israel as an occupying power to the occupied territories. Israel exists as a state, and no one can deny it exists. But Israel must exist -- must recognize our existence as Palestinians. Israel, to this minute, does not recognize our very existence. And it is the stronger, it's the more powerful, it's the victory who has been able to smash all the Arab countries, to invade Lebanon, to destroy Lebanon. It is up to that power to recognize first the existence of the Palestinians. And we certainly will recognize the existence of Israel once Israel recognizes our right to self-determination and to an identity and a state.

KALB: Mr. Shawa, with all due respect, the Israeli leadership has said repeatedly that it recognizes the Palestinian people and would like to negotiate with them, but

that it would not want to negotiate with the PLO, refuses to do that.

Aren't you bridging, illogically, in a way, two issues here, the PLO and the Palestinian people?

SHAWA: I would like to make it very clear that the PLO constitute the Palestine people. The Palestinians, in general, inside the occupied territories and outside the occupied territories, as a whole, constitute the PLO. We are part and parcel of the PLO. They are defending our course. And that is why we support them to the utmost extent.

ROWAN: Mayor Friej, two weeks ago you told the New York Times, "The American signature on the Camp David Accords is not worth the ashes on your cigarette." Are you partly blaming the United States for what was done to the PLO in Lebanon?

MAYOR FRIEJ: I am blaming the United States for what has befallen the Arab women and children and civilian people in Lebanon, the Palestinians and the Lebanese, and the destruction of West Beirut, the obliteration of the Palestinian refugees' camps in Tyre, Sidon, Damour, and other places.

ROWAN: Are you suggesting that the United States was a secret collaborator with Israel in this war?

MAYOR FRIEJ: I think that's an open secret. I think that's a fact.

ROWAN: Now, you also told the Washington Post, "I feel betrayed. All the Palestinians feel betrayed. The PLO was deceived by the Arab states, who didn't lift a finger to help the PLO in Lebanon."

Do you blame all the Arab world for...

MAYOR FRIEJ: I certainly blame the Arab governments for their shameful failure to do anything during the Lebanese crisis. And I think the Arab leaders have known too well, in their hearts, that they cannot militarily fight Israel. So then they should have advised the PLO to try a political channel.

ROWAN: To what extent do you blame Egypt for what took place? Do you think this might not have happened if Mr. Sadat had not made peace with Israel?

MAYOR FRIEJ: No, this would have happened, in any way.

By the way, the Egyptian stand during this crisis has been really normal and good.



SCHWEID: Mayor Shawa, Israeli Defense Minister Sharon has said again there is a Palestinian state now. And when he says that, of course, he infers that he does recognize -- he implies he does recognize the existence of the Palestinian people. It is the state we now know as Jordan, where 70 percent of the people are Palestinian.

Is that a possible solution to the Palestinian problem?

SHAWA: I don't think it is possible at all. And I don't think any man of reason would suggest such a thing. Jordan is a state recognized by the United Nations and admitted to the United Nations the same as Israel was. How can we come and abolish a state already recognized by the United Nations just to please Israel, to please Israel in the sense that it does not want to give the Palestinians their right to a state on their own hand which Israel usurped from them and from which Israel has thrown out so many millions? The Lebanese problem would have never happened if it was not for Israel, who threw out 500,000 inside Lebanon now and who constitute the major problem in Lebanon.

SCHWEID: I don't think Mr. Sharon is talking of abolition. In fact, he has said that King Hussein could stay on the throne.

But in any event, are you talking of two Palestinian states now? Where would your Palestinian state be? Would it go to the '67 borders? Would it go to the '48 borders? Or would it eventually, by evolution, perhaps by peaceful means, eliminate the Jewish state?

SHAWA: I'm not speaking of two Palestines. I'm speaking of one Palestine only. And that one Palestine must be established on Palestine soil, and not on Trans-Jordanian soil.

SCHWEID: But I'm trying to get...

SHAWA: Moreover...

SCHWEID: I'm trying to get a definition of that territory. Is that Tel Aviv? Is that Jerusalem? Is it all of Jerusalem? Is it half of Jerusalem? What are you trying to get?

SHAWA: It's a Palestine state on the occupied territories that I mean.

And I would like to mention one thing in this connection. Why has not Israel itself defined its state? It only speaks of itself as a state with defensible borders. Where are those defensible borders? Are they in the Golan or in Lebanon or across Jordan on the Saudi borders? Where do they

mean Israel should extend?

MONROE: Mr. Friej, I think you indicated you wanted to add to this.

MAYOR FRIEJ: Yes. I think the Palestinians should have a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with the borders of 1967 to be mutually agreed or negotiated, with East Jerusalem to be the administrative capital of the Arab state, with West Jerusalem to be the capital of the Jewish state. And the two states, the Arab state and the Jewish state, should learn how to live together in peace as good neighbors, as equal neighbors in a civilized way.

FLETCHER: Mayor Friej, Israel says that autonomy is for the people, not the land. Is that a possible solution?

MAYOR FRIEJ: This is not a -- well, this is an administrative arrangement. In Camp David it is written "full autonomy." Full autonomy means full autonomy, means legislation, land, water resources, taxation, all these things.

What the Israelis are really talking about is a very limited, powerless administrative formula, which we cannot accept. But the Egyptian formula for autonomy, if it would be accepted by the United States and by Israel, I think the majority of our people in the occupied territories will find it acceptable too.

But we have not fought for 60 years to accept a very limited, powerless administrative council without doing anything.

FLETCHER: So what should the PLO do now?

MAYOR FRIEJ: The PLO should now concentrate on the political campaign to explain our cause, to convince the whole world, and especially the public opinion in America, of our sincere desire for peace, for peaceful coexistence with Israel. I think the PLO should initiate a Palestinian peace initiative. And I think the PLO should have to convince the United States Government and people of our desire for peace.

MONROE: Mayor Friej, you spoke a few days ago about the possibility of resigning. Are you seriously thinking about resigning?

MAYOR FRIEJ: Not in the time being. No, sir.

MONROE: But you do feel somewhat discouraged.

MAYOR FRIEJ: I am very discouraged. I'm really very

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discouraged because this tragic situation through which we are passing is really very terrible on us.

MONROE: Thank you, Mayor Friej and Mr. Shawa for being with us today on Meet the Press.